

**The Dynamics of Decentralization of Higher Education Delivery and Local Politics in the Philippines: The Case of Two Mandaue City Colleges in Cebu Province**

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## Abstract

This study explores how the decentralization law of 1991 in the Philippines has provided the conditions for the interface of higher education and politics by virtue of Local Government Units (LGUs) establishment of Local Colleges and Universities (LCUs). Anchored on educational politics framework, it specifically looks at the experience of Mandaue City which presently has two similarly named local colleges, one is Commission on Higher Education accredited and LGU supported, while the other has been deemed to have “no legal personality” but has persisted to operate nonetheless. This would create a conflict of legitimacy and later on manifest issues and challenges naturally beyond the immediate domain of education, but one that must be harnessed constructively given the realities of Philippine politics i.e. power struggle and political dynamics. The democratic opening engendered by the decentralization law to allow LGUs to establish post-secondary schools are beset with growing political tensions and contestations. Yet, there were also narratives and evidence of positive impact brought about by the decentralization of higher education. Using key informant interviews, focus group discussion and document reviews, this study contends that public educational ventures such as LCUs serve as a microcosm of the larger problem in Philippine higher education: improved access to higher education, but quality is deteriorating. As such, this study hopes to suggest several policy directions and practical considerations for national governments vis-à-vis the LGUs role as enabler and/or regulator of higher education.

**Keywords:** Philippines; local colleges and universities; local government units; commission on higher education; decentralization; politics of education.

## Introduction

The transition of the Philippines to a decentralized form of government has been noted as a form of democratization of the country after the fall of the authoritarian regime of Marcos (Brillantes, 1996; Bird and Rodriguez, 1999). While there exist a plethora of studies examining the impacts of decentralization in the country, most of them concluded that its promise and potential have not been fully realized due to elite capture, lack of accountability mechanisms and patronage politics (cf. Ishii, Hossain and Rees, 2007; Yilmaz and Venugopal, 2013; Shair-Rosenfield, 2016). Others however argued that compared to other Asian countries, the decentralization program of the country “has attained better performance” (Guess, 2005, p. 217) and local governments have become “more innovative, experimental and enterprising under decentralization” (Capuno, 2011, p. 65). In addition, the “shifting of power to sub-national governments had the potential to transform some of the most significant actors and relationships including, among others, the developmental capacity of states and the strategic calculations of politicians, non-governmental organizations and voters” (Eaton, 2001, p. 101).

Specifically, with the enactment of the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991 or Republic Act No. 7160, the decentralization law of the country, various social services originally controlled by the national government and its line agencies were devolved to the local level i.e. barangays (villages – the lowest political structure), municipalities, cities and provinces. These added duties, responsibilities and power devolved to the local level involves the following social service sectors: agricultural extension, community based forestry, field health and hospital services, public works, school building, social welfare services, tourism, telecommunications and housing (LGC, 1991). Whereas the LGU’s role with respect to the education service sector is only limited and confined to the construction of school buildings and classrooms and maintenance aspects (Brillantes, 2003; Atienza, 2006; Go, 2016, p. 1), however embedded in the LGC are salient provisions that provided enabling mechanisms for various explorations in local autonomy and public welfare. This democratic space allows LGUs free rein in guiding the path of their local development (Cariño, 2002, 2004; Dayrit, 2005; Legaspi, 2003, cited in Saloma, Jayme Lao and Advincula-Lopez, 2013). Essentially, the Code provides the opportunity for local governments in the country to venture into the tertiary level of education by establishing public colleges named as Local Colleges and Universities financed directly from its local treasury.<sup>1</sup>

Given this legal provision, several LGUs in the country initiated the creation of local public higher education institutions (HEIs). In the past few years, the country has witnessed a dramatic increase of LGU-run colleges nationwide. In 2015, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) listed 101 LCUs nationwide, offering technical and vocational training and degree-granting programs (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2016). Given its preference to serve the poor and marginalized sectors of the Philippine society at the local level, the role that LCUs play in addressing the country’s higher education problem are immense (Chao, 2012; Dayrit, 2005).

This study looks at the two cases of Mandaue City Colleges in the city of Mandaue in the province of Cebu. It was selected due to its peculiar case of having a similarly named college

<sup>1</sup> In the Philippines, local government funded tertiary schools are variously called “local college”, “community college”, “municipal college”, “city college”, “public college”, “local university and colleges” and “local colleges and universities”. Based on CHED Memorandum Order No. 32 Series of 2006, a “local college or university” refers to a public higher education institution established by the LGUs through an enabling ordinance, and financially supported by the concerned local government unit.

within the same LGU; one is accredited by the CHED and financially supported by the city, and the other operates privately under the administration of the former College Administrator of Mandaue City College (MCC) in 2005, who claims to be the “real” and “legitimate” Mandaue City College, but was not given government authority. This issue is very controversial to the point that the CHED Region VII and Mandaue City Government filed a legal action against the former MCC Administrator to stop the operation of this other school. Most importantly, on July 4, 2011, even CHED Chairperson Dr. Patricia Licuanan by virtue of Commission En Banc Resolution No. 163-2011 issued a public notice informing that the Mandaue City College under the administration of the former college administrator “has no legal personality to operate a local college and the degrees offered are spurious and illegal and shall not be recognized by the Commission” (Cuyos, 2011, para. 3). As such, it would be very interesting to look into how this conflict came about and how does this figure in the whole dynamics of decentralization of higher education and politics in the Philippines.

The study has three main objectives: (1) to identify the experience of Mandaue city in its decision to venture into higher education availing on the opening in the Local Government Code; (2) to identify how the ‘MCC conflict’ inform about the nature and condition of higher education system in the Philippines in general, and the state of LCUs specifically; and (3) to determine the extent of how the peculiarities of local politics affects the public venture of LGU into higher education as shown in the experience of the conflict in Mandaue City College.

### **Framework and Research Method**

The politics of education or educational politics is an eclectic field that seeks to incorporate notions of authority, power and influence in the distribution of scarce and valued resources at different levels of the education sector (Johnson, 2003; Wong, 1994). It also looks at the enduring value conflicts of efficiency, quality, equity and choice in educational settings, whose intellectual roots and development can be traced to political science (Stout, Tallerico and Scribner, 1994; Malen, 1994; Wong, 1994; Scribner and Layton, 2003; McLendon, 2003a; 2003b; Scribner, Aleman and Maxcy, 2003). Anchored on the core ideas of political science, the field of educational politics argues that “school governance and decisions are embedded in the core practices of our political systems” (Wong, 1994, p. 22), prescribed ways in which most educational policies are influenced by the larger political institutions and processes of decision-making. It also deepens both the conceptual and practical understanding of power structure and democratic exercise (Wong, 1994).

The use of “politics of education” as a framework of analysis for this study was essential and valuable in understanding how local political dynamics shape and influence the whole educational-governmental enterprise. Candelaria (2012) argued that the problem of public education in the third world especially in the Philippines is a political problem and therefore requires a political solution.

Methodologically, the primary source of data for this research is key informant interviews (KIIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). KIIIs were used to extract the experiences of the respondents to reveal the behavioral patterns of the actors, and to check and validate the accounts of other interviews conducted (Pierce, 2008). Focus group discussion is used in examining what, how and why people think about the issues of import to them without compelling them into making decisions or reaching a consensus (Liamputpong, 2011). The respondents were asked about their experiences in their capacities as college students, graduates and teachers, college administrators, city government officials and national

government agency official. Specific questions about whether there was a necessity to create a tertiary school in the city funded by the local government, what sort of issues and problems the college have confronted, what were the impacts and contributions of the college to the city and its people and how they were affected by the conflict that arise due to the existence of two similarly named colleges in their locality were probed from the respondents.

This research study also used document review like school records, newspaper articles and government documents pertaining to LCUs. Document review helps to “develop novel accounts and interpretations of significant events” (Burnham, Lutz, Grant & Layton-Henry, 2008, p. 208). The interviews, FGD and document gathering were conducted between January 2015 and April 2016. Informed consent from all respondents was secured prior to the said methodologies for ethical consideration.

## Literature Review

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are either colleges or universities, and are generally classified as private or public. Public HEIs are further classified as State University and College (SUC) or Local College and University (LCU). SUCs are fully funded by the national government as determined by the Philippine Congress. LCUs, on the other hand, are run by local government units. Over the past years, public higher education in the country has been characterized by the rise in the number of SUCs as the LCUs set up by provinces and cities exercise their autonomy (Tan, 2012; CHED, 2012; 2013; 2015). The 1991 Local Government Code provides LGUs i.e. a barangay (village), a municipality, city, or a province, in the country opportunity to venture into the tertiary level of education by establishing public colleges named as Local Colleges and Universities financed directly from its local treasury. Based on the LGC (1991), specifically Section 447(a)(5)(x) (Municipality), 458(a)(5)(x) (City), and 468(a)(4)(iii) (Province), an LGU can establish a local college provided that, “[s]ubject to the availability of funds and to existing laws, rules and regulations, establish and provide for the operation of vocational and technical schools and similar post-secondary institutions and, with the approval of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, fix and collect reasonable fees and other school charges on said institutions, subject to existing laws on tuition fees.”

The name Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) was changed in 1994 to Department of Education (DepEd), when the Republic Act 7722, otherwise known as the “Higher Education Act”, was enacted creating the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). CHED is now tasked to supervise both public and private institutions of higher education and the degree-granting programs in the country; hence LCUs are under CHED’s sphere of regulation.

With this legal opening, it encourages LGUs nationwide to establish their own version of local centers of higher learning. Over the years, the country has witnessed a substantial growth of LGU-run colleges nationwide, from 46 LCUs in 2003 to 101 public colleges in 2015 (CHED, 2016). Unfortunately, the expansion of educational opportunities brought about by these HEIs is accompanied by a deteriorating quality of education in the country (Corpus, 2003; Durban & Catalan, 2012). Specifically, for LCUs, it was reported however that only a few of the courses offered in these schools have permits from the government and are operating for commercial benefit (Chua, 2011).

CHED Chairman Patricia Licuanan (2012) sums up the deteriorating quality of higher education of the country specifically about the condition of local colleges and universities, among others: poor performance in licensure examinations, inadequate faculty credentials, only 100 or 5.6 percent have adequate facilities out of more than 1,800 HEIs, and programs have increased beyond the original mandate. Montemar, Recio, Hecita and Dela Cruz (2013) argued that the problems in LCUs cannot be divorced from the realities of the larger problems that characterize the Philippine higher education system. Admittedly, while the entry of local government units into higher education have addressed only the ‘equity’ and ‘access’ gap in higher education, the decentralized set-up has affected the state of ‘quality’ of HEIs in the country (Montemar et.al, 2013). It was even argued that the development of LCUs is affected by the local political dynamics (Montemar et al., 2013).

### **Socio-Demographic Profile of Mandaue City**

Mandaue City College is located in Mandaue City in Cebu Province. Mandaue City is a first income class highly urbanized city (i.e. with an average income of PHP 400 million or more) in the region of Central Visayas, Philippines. Mandaue City is situated on the coastal region of Cebu Province. It borders Mactan Island on the east side where Lapu-Lapu City is located, Cebu city in the south and west, and by the Municipality of Consolacion in the north. The city has an area of 2,518 ha (6,220 acres). As of 2015, the city has a population of 362,654 (PSA, 2015). Mandaue City is composed of 27 barangays all are classified as urban. The largest population is located in barangay Pakna-an (26, 943).



Figure 1: Location of Mandaue City in Cebu. (Wikipedia, 2014. Retrieved August 25, 2017 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandaue>).

Mandaue City is considered as Cebu’s new economic driver with more than 10,000 business and industrial establishments and considering 40% of Cebu’s export companies are found in Mandaue. The city is home to several institutions of academic learning. There are 53 private schools in Mandaue City (DepEd, 2015) several of which provide educational services to the city covering pre-school up to post-graduate level. In addition, there are 23 public secondary schools and 27 public elementary schools (DepEd, 2015) delivering basic education to the city. However, in spite of the presence of many higher educational institutions in the city, it is inherently private; hence, it imposes high tuition and other fees which is beyond the financial capacity of its poor and underprivileged constituents (Manalang, 1992; Joshi, 2007).

## Profile of Mandaue City College

Mandaue City College (MCC) is the only CHED-accredited local government higher educational institution in the City of Mandaue (DepEd, 2015). It was initially established by the enactment of Sangguniang Panglungsod (City Council) Ordinance No. 10-2005-324A, which was subsequently revised on October 11, 2010 pursuant to City Council Ordinance No. 12-2010-58, known as the “Revised Charter of the Mandaue City College”. The college charges PHP 100 per unit and miscellaneous and other fees of about PHP 1,500. The programs offered by the college includes nine bachelor’s program and their specializations and three specialized diploma courses e.g. among others, Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEEd), Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSEd), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT).

## Results and Discussion

### **Decentralization Experience of Mandaue City College: Invoking Pro-poor Policy for Delivering Higher Education Service at the Local Level**

In a city surrounded by big industrial establishments and major private higher educational institutions, the creation of a public college that caters primarily to children of poor and underprivileged families is a massive task for any LGU whose mandate under the LGC of 1991 is only in the basic education sector. As intimated by the City Councilor, who sits as the Chairman of the Committee on Public Works and Infrastructure in an interview, he asserted that the creation of MCC as very appropriate taking account of the economic condition of the city that, “[M]andaue city is the most progressive city in the entire province of Cebu. Education then is very vital in a highly-urbanized local government like Mandaue especially job opportunities abounds. There are many industries like the call center and malls in which would look for potential employees. This is where college education comes into play. These industries will be looking for applicants with qualified degrees mostly with college degrees, before they will be hired. So if you are a college graduate, whom the MCC aims to produce, chances are great for you to be employed.”

Moreover, the establishment of MCC is a response to the need for a more affordable alternative from private colleges noted by the Office of the Mayor’s Executive Secretary. When argued if there was a need to create a local college, the former OIC of MCC and now the Dean of School Education and Director of Research argued that there are students who cannot afford to go to private colleges and even to public state colleges. This is true even if the city has grown so big economically and geographically proximate to the provincial capital, Cebu City – the hub of major universities in the region and the province. Most students noted in the FGD, conducted on February 4, 2016 at the campus of the MCC funded by the LGU, the problem of affordability and accessibility in established universities in Metro Cebu and even in Mandaue City that constrained them from studying.

Like any other educational endeavor, the venture however is engulfed with various challenges typical of the Philippine higher education system. Most of the respondents cited the following problems:

1. Lack of sufficient classrooms and school buildings conducive for learning e.g. not well-ventilated, no electric fans, few chairs, smells bad, spaces are cramped;

2. Inadequate instructional materials like books, poor laboratory facilities like computers and other pedagogical tools for the improvement of teacher and student intellectual growth;
3. No permanent school site, as the college shares several facilities of the building with other departments of the city government. Students confided several uncomfortable encounters with patients e.g. some were dying and some were dead, inside the school premises because the public city hospital is inside the shared facility in the Sports Complex;
4. Bureaucratic red tape in procurement procedures with respect to the delay of funds essential for the everyday maintenance and operation of the school;
5. Insufficient budgetary allocation from the city as the college receives an annual budgetary subsidy from the city of PHP 10,000,000 for all its operation. This appropriation is very “small” and “meager” as acknowledged by most officials both from the city government and the college.

Notwithstanding problems of school facilities and limited budget, there is an overriding general understanding from most respondents of the importance and necessity of the establishment of the MCC. The Vice Chairman of the Local School Board (LSB) and concurrently the Barangay Chieftain of Subangdaku (one of the barangays in Mandaue) and President of Alliance of Barangay Captains/Chieftain (ABC) of Mandaue City asserted in an interview that the creation of a local college like MCC is thought to be a creative mechanism that attains the same goal and mission as giving free college scholarships for poor but deserving constituents of the city, “[t]o help our brothers and sisters avail of college education”.

He added that, “[s]pending on social services like the creation of a local college is a form of human development as the city helps its poor constituents to be ready for the real world competition as it alleviates their burden, especially that college education is very expensive in the country.”



Figure 2: The Mandaue City College campus in the City Sports Complex (photo taken by the author).

The college has no separate and permanent school site, but it is sharing with other local government offices like City Health Center and the Fire Department; thus, the presence of vehicles owned by government employees inside the campus.

Aware of the limited budget appropriated to the college (i.e. 10 million annually in a city that earns an annual average income of 400 million or above) and the request for greater budgetary

allocation every fiscal year, the Executive Secretary reminded that the city administration had to temper it because the local college is not the only service the city provides. It was asserted however that that the college is not an income-generating project of the city government. If anything, the City Vice Mayor, College Administrator and the Assistant College Administrator for Administration have shared the same sentiment that MCC is a form of basic service as it provides cheap and affordable tuition fee for its people.

Generally, most of them argued that the whole enterprise is geared towards the long-term goal of educating the local populace providing necessary skills for their future endeavors, to have a better chance of getting a good job. An alumna shared in an interview, he graduated with honors with the degree of Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in Filipino in 2014, and he was very grateful for the learning and values he received from his teachers. He learned the “observance of proper communication”, “how to work and behave with peers and fellow professionals”, and “be dedicated to your work and industry” which aids him in working as a Call Center agent. Most importantly, most of students noted in the FGD that:

Students like me personally have to say thank you for the city government and the college officials for all the things they have done for the school. If not for them, we wouldn't be here. (Student A)

If the students of the University of the Philippines are called as Iskolars ng Bayan (scholars of the nation), we are scholars of the city of Mandaue. (Student B)

Even though these are all the facilities we have, despite the dilapidated infrastructure, we are still very dedicated. We are very thankful because we still have a school. (Student C)

Because the city government subsidizes for our study, there is no reason for us to be lazy because the college has not forsaken us through the establishment of the college. (Student D)

### **Politics in the MCC: How the Local College Became a Site of Power Struggle**

As can be noticed from the beginning, the college was initially established in 2005 through an enabling ordinance however it was changed in 2010 pursuant to another local legislation. The city college was saddled with controversies which rendered the city of Mandaue with two similarly named Mandaue City Colleges. Originally, MCC was established in 2005 during the incumbency of the former mayor who was suspended by the Ombudsman due to improper use of funds in 2007 as confided by the Vice Chair of the Local School Board (LSB). Being unable to run for office since he served office for three successive electoral cycles already, his son ran in his stead in that year's local election but was defeated by the current City Mayor. He is on his last term and has previously served office from 2007 to 2010, 2010 to 2013, and 2013 to 2016, winning in three successive mayoral elections. On May 2016, he ran successfully for Congress winning as Sixth District Representative of the Province of Cebu (Gitgano, 2016).

The conflict began, as intimated by the former OIC MCC College Administrator, Executive Secretary and the Vice Chair of the LSB, during the interim period when the former mayor was serving suspension allowing the Vice Mayor in 2007 to assume the Mayoralty, revealing several anomalies concerning government funds that were not liquidated from the college administrator. Most officials both from the college and city asserted that they made repeated

demands for the then administrator to render accounting of the college expenses; unfortunately, he did not satisfactorily comply. Thus, the OIC Mayor appointed a new college administrator. She was the interim MCC college administrator during the 2007–2011 period before the college in 2012 selected a new college administrator who serves presently.

The incumbent administrator at the time (in 2007) stood in firm stand that he is the “rightful” administrator as per city ordinance. It was noted in their school’s website that:

Under City Ordinance No. 10-2005-324A – an Ordinance Establishing the Mandaue City College and authorizing the appropriation of funds therefor, specifically Section 6: (a) The President – the administration of the City College shall be vested in the President. He shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees for a term of six (6) years; Provided, That the President of the City College may be reappointed after his term shall be expired. (Agustillo, n.d.).

Thus, technically he is the “rightful” president. Embattled, confused and gradually developing into a media story for local and national broadsheet (“Police arrest Mandaue”, 2008; Basilan, 2011; “Options for Mandaue”, 2011; Cuyos, 2011; Perolina, 2011), the Regional Office of the Commission on Higher Education have intervened. The Education Specialist Supervisor of CHED Region VII recalled in an interview that CHED only mediated to have a smooth operation of the college:

[W]hen we went there, we have empty knowledge about their operation or the nitty-gritty details of the issue or the gravity of the whole situation. We went to understand what's happening and base on our study from both parties, we submitted a report to the City Council. We found out that, based on the local ordinance, the college administrator who was removed has the right to stay until six years. However, there were members of the city council who opposed to the leadership of the administrator and was asked to step down, graciously. It was this time then when the two parties filed cases and counter lawsuit against one another.

Defiant, the ousted administrator established a separate campus bearing exactly the name of the Mandaue City College located in a different barangay within the city. In effect, there are two similarly named city colleges in the province and in Mandaue City. Given this, CHED Region VII and Mandaue City Government filed a legal action against the former MCC Administrator to stop the operation of this other school. Likewise, CHED, thru the Office of the Chairman Patricia Licuanan issued a Notice to the Public (Cuyos, 2011) declaring that the MCC created by the former administrator has no legal personality.

Undeterred, this administrator intimated in an interview that the intervention of CHED thru the issuance of the closure order is very misleading, as its real mandate is only to control private colleges. He said CHED’s role vis-à-vis LCUs is to monitor them only, not to “control” citing that CHED does not have regulatory powers. He claimed that this is attributed to CHED’s incompetence and dalliance with politics, noting that “as a national agency, CHED should not involve themselves in politics. They should be neutral.”<sup>2</sup> He argued also that “CHED does not have the power to close colleges, but they only have the power to recommend for closure. It is the court that has the right to issue closure orders, as CHED does not have the police power.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This was noted by the former MCC Administrator who was removed from office and created a new city college named similarly. He is the president of this established school.

<sup>3</sup> This was noted in an interview by the former MCC administrator.

This is the reason why the LGU has not enforced the closure order since the court has yet to render its final decision.

In addition, he pointed out that it is the intervention of politics which serves as the reason how and why there exist two similarly named local colleges in Mandaue City.

It becomes the reason why there are two Mandaue City Colleges because if politics will involve in local colleges; the problem is, if the president is not with the mayor (politically or ideologically), the present mayor will create his own college because, the first thing he will do is to take out the present president and change it to his own men. That is the problem of most local colleges nationwide. There is really too much politics.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, while all this unfolds, some students were taken aback. Several students call to mind their experience in the FGD how in every school competition they joined in people would confuse them from the other campus. They even mentioned moments when they encounter several students from other school asserting that theirs is the “real” and “legitimate” college and “CHED is not an accrediting body”. Most of them shared that ultimately the existence of two MCCs “divides and confuses the general public”. Doubtless, all of the students understand too well the root cause of the matter.<sup>5</sup>

By now, we all know who those people who rule the school are and the city before. We also have to understand and accept the reality that this is really all about politics. Just this last semester, this issue again surfaces back due to several flyers and pamphlets with words “WE ARE THE REAL MCC” written over it. I asked those classmates where they got those flyers; they said it was distributed in the city plaza by some students. I asked why and they replied that their college president is running for Congress. Those flyers really contain the name of MCC. It made me wonder why the city government allowed this from happening. The city government through the office of the Mayor is very powerful. In the many years when this issue begun, until now it remained unresolved and unanswered. Our future is at risk because the elections are fast approaching. (Student H)

The student was referring to the May 2016 Elections which interestingly the college president of the “other MCC” competes for a congressional post challenging the outgoing Mayor. When probed on the rationale over his decision to enter the political fray, though he eventually lost, he interprets as such to “show that the real problem of the MCC conflict is politics, and the solution is inherently political”.

As of now, the case of two Mandaue City Colleges is still pending finality in the local courts. Observing the due process of law, the city government of Mandaue cannot forcibly close the operation of the other MCC. After all, as intimated by the Executive Secretary to the Office of the Mayor, they will just simply open to another area and resume its operation.

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<sup>4</sup> This is noted by the former MCC administrator in an interview.

<sup>5</sup> Such remarks were noted by most interviewed students in an FGD session conducted.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study began with three main objectives: (1) to identify the experience of Mandaue city in its decision to venture into higher education availing on the opening in the LGC; (2) to identify how the “MCC conflict” informs about the nature and condition of higher education system in the Philippines in general, and the state of LCUs specifically; and (3) to determine the extent of how the peculiarities of local politics affects the public venture of LGU into higher education as shown in the experience of the conflict in Mandaue City College. Using the “politics of education” framework, it was shown how the experience of Mandaue City in its decision to venture into putting up a public college has been viewed as a form of pro-poor educational investment intended to address higher educational gaps at the local level (Bird and Rodriguez, 1999). This is confirmed by the narratives of some students and graduates who articulated on the positive impact of the government venture into higher education, despite the challenges of inadequate facilities, limited funding and issues of quality assurance.

Anchored on the salient provisions of the decentralization law of the country, the venture into higher education of Mandaue city government however was beset with challenges that are naturally outside the domain of education arena, i.e. power and politics. This occurred due to the public nature of the educational endeavor as the college is financially dependent to the city government. In addition, the venture was riven with local oppositional politics, questions of legitimacy and authority, intervention of a higher education regulatory body and nuances of power struggle which affects the operations and functions of such schools. In practical setting, the controversy showed the political dimension of the educational venture. It was apparent from the onset that the Mandaue City College was created by a political leadership amidst an environment vulnerable to the local political dynamics and various policy actors. In the case study presented, it was apparent that the LGU-run public college has transformed into an arena of local political struggle, turning the educational venture into what Johnson (2003, p. 58) considered as a “political enterprise”.

Moreover, this study reveals contestations for power and cleavages of power relations that exist in education in the Philippines (Candelaria, 2012; Contreras, 2013). The MCC experience showed that the school has come to be understood as a political arena rife with macro and micro-political processes (Wong, 1994; Strout et. al., 1994; Scribner et. al., 2003; McLendon, 2003a; 2003b; Björk and Blasé, 2009; Fiske, 1996). Ultimately, the decentralization law of 1991 provided the conditions for the interface of higher education and politics in the country by virtue of LGU’s establishment of local universities and colleges (Chao, 2012).

As such, this study raises important practical consideration about the proactive role of the national government as an enabler and regulator of higher education. For future research, it would be interesting to look if the national government whose legal mandate is enshrined under the Philippine Constitution (1987) which aims to “protect and promote shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all (Section 1, Article XIV)” allows LGUs to venture into higher education under the decentralization law of 1991. Should the State respond more to the problems of “quality” education, instead of simply encouraging LGUs to put up local public higher educational institutions? The State must institute clearer directives and policy guidelines that depart from excessive commitment to “expansion” of higher education, to focus more on improving the structural and curricular gaps that undermines that condition of Philippine higher education.

Also, the discourse of “politics” as a process of attaining ends that must be harnessed constructively so as to effect positive changes not simply as a mechanism for personal aggrandizement and serving one’s political aspirations, should be pursued extensively (Candelaria, 2012). It must be noted that despite the influence of politics in the creation and operation of the MCC, there was still evidence of valuable impacts of the college to the community.

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